

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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June 14, 2013

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ed Whitfield
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Upton and Chairman Whitfield:

On Monday, the International Energy Agency (IEA) released a report concluding that the world is “not on track” to meet the goal of limiting global average temperature rise to below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius) above preindustrial levels.¹ We are writing to request that the Committee hold a hearing on this important new report.

Climate scientists believe that if global average temperatures increase beyond 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, society will face devastating impacts. Among the expected impacts are flooding of coastal cities; increased risks to our food supply; unprecedented heat waves and exacerbated water scarcity in many regions; increased frequency of high-intensity tropical cyclones; and irreversible loss of biodiversity, including coral reef systems.²

¹ International Energy Agency (IEA), *Redrawing the Energy-Climate Map: World Energy Outlook Special Report* (Jun. 2013) (online at <http://www.worldenergyoutlook.org/media/weowebiste/2013/energyclimatemap/RedrawingEnergyClimateMap.pdf>), at 9.

² See, e.g., World Bank, *Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must be Avoided*, (Nov. 2012) (online at http://climatechange.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/Turn_Down_the_heat_Why_a_4_degree_centrigrade_warmer_world_must_be_avoided.pdf).

Recognizing this danger, the United States and 192 other countries joined together in 2010 to establish a goal of limiting global temperature rise to below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit.³

The IEA report concludes that the world is failing to meet this goal. Globally, greenhouse gas emissions, which are driving climate change, are “increasing rapidly.”⁴ Last year, these emissions reached a new historic high, and just last month carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere exceeded 400 parts per million for the first time in several hundred millennia.⁵ Unless the world takes significant new actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions now, the report projects that global temperatures could rise by more than 9 degrees Fahrenheit (5.3 degrees Celsius), which would portend catastrophic climate impacts.⁶

These are ominous warnings, but there is some good news. The report finds that it is not too late to keep temperatures below the most dangerous levels if the world acts now to implement cost-effective policies to reduce emissions.⁷ But time is running out. Delaying action will expose society to significant, costly, unpredictable, and possibly irreversible climate change.

Addressing climate change will require actions over the long-term, but the report highlights four policies that could be implemented now and through 2020 at no net economic cost. These cost-effective policies would reduce emissions sufficiently to “keep the door open” to achieving the 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit goal over the long-term.⁸ Each of these policies focuses on energy use, which accounts for two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions – mostly from the use of fossil fuels – and is thus “at the heart” of the climate challenge.⁹ The policies rely on existing technologies that can be widely deployed in the short-term. And in addition to their climate benefits, the policies help reduce local air pollution and increase energy security.¹⁰

First, the report recommends that countries adopt specific energy efficiency measures, including more efficient heating and cooling systems in residential and commercial buildings;

³ The Cancun Agreements: Outcome of the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Decision 1/CP.16 (online at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf>).

⁴ IEA (2013), *supra* note 1.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.* at 43.

more efficient appliances and lighting in residential and commercial buildings; more efficient industrial pumps, compressors, and other electric motor systems; and higher fuel economy standards for motor vehicles. These energy efficiency measures account for half of the emissions reductions that the report proposes through the year 2020.¹¹

Second, the report proposes that countries limit the construction and use of inefficient, subcritical coal-fired power plants and switch instead to cleaner and more efficient plants.¹²

Third, the report recommends that countries reduce emissions of methane – a potent greenhouse gas – from upstream oil and gas production by installing readily available technologies in the short-term and pursuing additional longer-term reduction strategies.¹³

Fourth, the report proposes that countries accelerate the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies, which exacerbate climate change by encouraging consumption of carbon pollution emitting energy.¹⁴

While energy policies are needed to address climate change, it is also important to recognize, as the report points out, that the energy sector itself will not be immune from the impacts of climate change. Rising temperatures from unchecked warming threaten the security and reliability of our energy systems with extreme weather events, changes to heating and cooling demands, and sea level rise.¹⁵ Accordingly, energy policy reforms are needed not just to address climate change broadly but also to protect our energy systems themselves.

We have written on numerous previous occasions requesting that the Committee hold hearings on climate change. But no hearings have been held or scheduled in response to our last 26 hearing requests. The Committee's failure to listen to the scientific experts is irresponsible and dangerous. According to the IEA, the report's recommended policies can be implemented now at no net cost to society. But if we continue to delay, avoiding catastrophic climate change will instead cost the global economy trillions of dollars.¹⁶ And not acting at all will lead to destructive climate impacts and unimaginable costs to society and our economy.

¹¹ *Id.* at 53-57.

¹² *Id.* at 58-62

¹³ *Id.* at 62-66.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 66-70.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 11.

¹⁶ *Id.*

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We urge you to schedule a series of hearings in the near future to examine the critically important issues raised by the IEA report and other recent studies so that we can responsibly confront this serious threat.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member



Bobby L. Rush
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and
Power